Ward 7

April 2015

Connected Communities Initiative
Community Technology Plan
Benning Ridge • Marshall Heights

Empowering Communities Through Technology

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Digital Inclusion Initiative • Powered by OCTO

Acknowledgements

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1 Overview

The ability to find a job, pay bills, and stay connected to family is often dependent on having a reliable Internet connection at home. Unfortunately, there are approximately 160,000 District residents, primarily in the city's most economically vulnerable neighborhoods, who lack high-speed Internet access at home. Home broadband adoption has reached 76% in the District of Columbia–higher than the national average–but the digital divide in D.C. persists. Wards 5, 7, and 8 have an average broadband adoption rate below 65%, while the District's other five wards have a rate above 85%.

Launched in 2014 by Connect.D.C., the Connected Communities Initiative (CCI) aims to increase Internet access and use by residents in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods in the District of Columbia. The planning phase of the initiative was funded by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's State Broadband Initiative grant, which supports local efforts to integrate broadband and information technology into the local economy. Created with input from residents and led by local stakeholders, CCI focuses on clusters of neighborhoods to assess the challenges facing each community, investigate barriers to Internet access and usage, and identify technology resources to help community stakeholders address those challenges.

The first phase of CCI started with the creation of "digital footprints" in Wards 7 and 8, in five low-income neighborhoods in the District. The Ward 7 digital footprint is comprised of two adjacent neighborhoods, Benning Ridge and Marshall Heights. The immediate and long-term goals of CCI are to:

- Engage community stakeholders about their barriers to technology;
- Develop community technology plans for each digital footprint with actionable digital inclusion strategies;
- Make technology relevant to the lives of residents and create interactive projects that demonstrate tangible ways to use it; and
- Increase home broadband access and technology use in each neighborhood.

We were inspired to create CCI by observing successful and groundbreaking initiatives in other cities across the country, including: Chicago's Smart Communities Initiative, Milwaukee's Building Digital Communities pilot program, Philadelphia's Center for Digital Inclusion and Technology, Seattle's Community Technology Program, and many others around the country. Each of these initiatives has used a multi-pronged approach that involved local government leadership, ongoing community engagement and feedback, multi-sector partnerships to implement initiatives, and relevant programs (e.g., computer training, employment, workforce development).[1]

The digital divide in the District is strongly correlated with education and income. Taking a more hyperlocal approach to promoting digital inclusion allows Connect.D.C. to focus attention and resources in the areas with the greatest need.

2 Digital Footprint

We define a digital footprint as a cluster of neighborhoods that share common challenges and barriers related to home broadband adoption, public Internet access, and technology use. The digital divide in the District is strongly correlated with education and income. Taking a more hyperlocal approach to promoting digital inclusion allows Connect.D.C. to focus attention and resources in the areas with the greatest need. Given the connection between socioeconomic status and broadband adoption, we also consider the potential benefits increased technology use could have on some of the related issues (e.g., employment, education) that impact the residents most likely to be offline.

The Ward 7 digital footprint consists of two adjacent residential neighborhoods in the easternmost section of the city: Benning Ridge and Marshall Heights. Each with their own histories, assets and challenges, Benning Ridge and Marshall Heights share a need for increased technology resources. These neighborhoods were selected as sites for the pilot CCI digital footprint based on their low broadband adoption rates of 53% (Benning Ridge) and 56% (Marshall Heights); additionally, Benning Ridge and Marshall Heights both possess community assets and local anchor institutions that made them ideal pilot locations.[2]

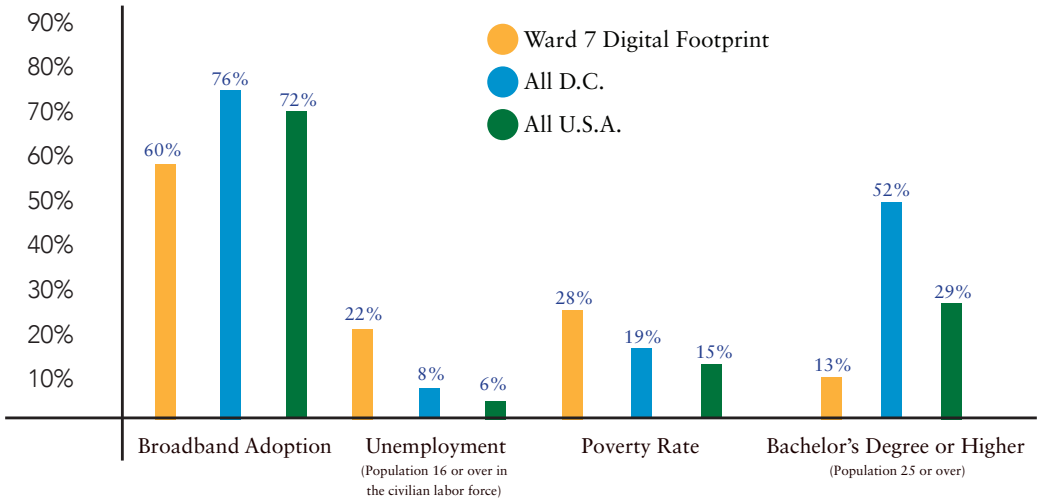
Benning Ridge

Benning Ridge, a predominantly African-American neighborhood, is home to approximately 7,000 people.[3] Benning Ridge residents have a median household income of $36,337 and 13% have a bachelor's degree or higher.[4]

Benning Terrace, a public housing complex that earned a reputation as the center of violent gang activity in the 1990s, is also located in this community. However, in recent years, middle- and upper-income residents have moved into the neighborhood, taking advantage of affordable properties in the neighborhood's quiet residential streets.

Families of Benning Ridge can take advantage of abundant green space in the expansive Fort Dupont Park as well as four recreation centers located in and around the neighborhood.The community is accessible by the Minnesota Avenue and Benning Road Metro Stations. Benning Ridge's Metro accessibility has attracted recent public and private investments, which are estimated to bring over 22,000 square feet of retail space and 376 new apartments adjacent to the Minnesota Avenue Metro Station as well as a planned extension of the H Street/ Benning Road streetcar line.[5]

Socioeconomic Snapshot



*The socioeconomic data presented here is based on census data from the census tracts that most closely align with the traditional boundaries of the neighborhoods. All data have been appropriately weighted using ACS population and housing estimates for the census tracts. The following census tracts represent Ward 7 Digital Footprint: 77.07, 99.04, 99.05, 99.06, and 99.07. The national and citywide unemployment data presented is from the US Department of Bureau and Labor Statistics.

Marshall Heights

Marshall Heights is located east of the Anacostia River and east of Benning Ridge. Like Benning Ridge, Marshall Heights is primarily a residential neighborhood with a predominantly African-American population.[6] Approximately 5,500 people reside in this neighborhood, which is accessible by Metro via the Capitol Heights Station and the Benning Road Station.[7]

Marshall Heights is in the early stages of an economic transition, spurred by the extensive Capitol Gateway development project. The highlight of the development, funded in part by a $31 million HOPE VI Revitalization Grant, will be the new Gateway Marketplace located next to the Capitol Heights Metro Station. The Marketplace will feature a 400,000 square foot mixed-use shopping center, including: a 135,500 square foot Walmart, 32,000 square feet for restaurants and additional retail, and 1,400 new residential units. This development project, which is expected to bring thousands of jobs, could bring significant changes to this lower-income neighborhood.

The unemployment rate in Ward 7 (14.3%) is one of the highest in the District.[8] Marshall Heights residents have a median household income of $38,676, and 13% earned a bachelor's degree or higher.[9] With greater investments like the planned development project, Marshall Heights could experience increased economic growth over the next several years.

Community Assets

The Ward 7 digital footprint has several institutions that can be leveraged to increase digital participation and engagement. Libraries have been instrumental in providing training, public computer access, and free Wi-Fi to low-income residents across the city. The Ward 7 digital footprint is home to the Capitol View Library in Marshall Heights. The Dorothy I. Height/Benning Library is located a short distance north of the Benning Road Metro Station.

Families in Benning Ridge and Marshall Heights are served by a number of public schools and public charter schools, including CW Harris Elementary, Nalle Elementary, Free Gospel Christian Academy, and KIPP D.C. Key Academy Public Charter School. The neighborhood's high school students are served by the recently rebuilt HD Woodson High School, which is setting a precedent for public schools across the District by offering a compulsory computer science class for all ninth graders.

The Ward 7 digital footprint is served by numerous service-oriented community-based organizations and stakeholders dedicated to improving life economically and socially for the families and businesses in Ward 7. East River Family Strengthening Collaborative (ERFSC) and the Marshall Heights Community Development Organization (MHCDO) anchor both communities. ERFSC collaborates with residents and organizations, private and public, to move low-income families from poverty to self-sufficiency. MHCDO provides employment and financial education services to residents and supports local economic development initiatives. Other community service organizations that have worked to actively engage residents and stakeholders in the Ward 7 digital footprint include: Keys to Canaan, Streetwize Foundation, and the Community Wellness Alliance. Several faith-based institutions that are very active in the community also serve residents in the Ward 7 digital footprint.


Library
DOROTHY IRENE HEIGHT
Library
DC public library

Process

The first phase of Connected Communities, which began in April 2014 and ended in January 2015, consisted of four parts: planning and outreach, community conversations, digital demonstration projects, and creation of the community tech plan. Each part of the process involved local stakeholders, including low-income residents, seniors, youth, and community leaders. Their feedback was incorporated into the community tech plan and strategies in section five.

Outreach and Engagement

The CCI team set up information tables and distributed fliers and surveys at community events between April and July. We talked to residents and community leaders about the initiative and recruited participants for future community conversations. The team also attended Ward 7 Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANC) meetings to inform the commissioners about CCI's mission, goals, and activities. We were also present at multiple community events in Ward 7, including: the D.C. Clergy Health and Wellness Breakfast at Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church, the Ward 7 Senior Sweet Hour of Prayer Fellowship Close-Out Program at First Rock Baptist Church, and ERFSC's Youth Anti-Violence Summit at Friendship Collegiate Public Charter School.

We engaged key stakeholder groups, including members of the faith-based community and leaders of local community-based organizations, to increase buy-in and receive input. ANC commissioners, faith leaders, community activists, and nonprofit staff are engaged with residents and have valuable insight into the unique issues facing residents in the digital footprint. We relied on established channels of communication between these groups and residents to help communicate CCI's processes and goals to residents.

Between June and August 2014, we conducted in-person surveys at community events, civic association meetings, and within neighborhoods. The survey was designed to collect demographic data, Internet usage data, and individual concerns of the randomly selected participants. Participants were asked whether they had home Internet service, how they accessed the Internet and what they did online.

Community Conversations

In July and August 2014, we hosted a series of community conversations to learn directly from residents and community leaders about everyday life in their neighborhoods. Representatives from a number of local faith-based partners and community-based organizations were present at the discussion group, including: The Keys to Canaan, First Rock Baptist Church, Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church, Momma's Safe Haven, ERFSC, Mercy Outreach International, East Washington Heights Baptist Church, and Unity East of the River Health Center.

Facilitators asked participants questions about the issues (e.g., jobs, education) impacting their communities and how residents use technology on a day-to-day basis. They also asked participants about the reasons some residents still do not use technology or do not have Internet service at home.

Each discussion was unique, demonstrating the diversity

Steps

Outreach and Engagement
Engage and survey residents, small businesses, community-based organizations and local leaders

Community Conversations
Discuss challenges facing neighborhoods and technology use by community stakeholders

Digital Demonstrations
Provide tangible examples of how technology can be used to improve the lives of community stakeholders

Community Tech Plans
Outline recommendations for increasing Internet access and use in each community

Implementation
Apply recommendations from the community tech plans

of thought and experience that exists in the communities, but a number of common themes emerged that added context to existing data and helped us gain valuable insights into the needs of those most affected by the digital divide.

Digital Demonstration Projects

We engaged residents by holding two digital demonstration projects designed to exhibit the practical application and everyday use of technology. The first digital demonstration was a Technology Scavenger Hunt that took place in August and the second was a Twitter Town Hall in September.

The Technology Scavenger Hunt challenged participants to solve clues and complete activities at local nonprofits, D.C. government buildings, and community institutions in Wards 7 and 8. The scavenger hunt highlighted the technology resources available to residents in both wards, including online government services, public computer centers, and technology programs for both youth and adults. The event was also a community day that included food, music, exhibitors, and family-friendly activities. Participants used mobile devices and social media to solve clues and search for answers. The top three teams won tablet computers.

The second digital demonstration was a Tech Town Hall that gave community stakeholders an opportunity to discuss social media and its impact on civic engagement. Moderated by Connect.D.C. with invited panelists representing Wards 7 and 8, the Tech Town Hall used Twitter to engage with elected officials, community leaders and residents to discuss issues impacting their communities. The town hall provided a vehicle for people to discuss national issues through a hyperlocal lens.

Community Technology Plan

This community tech plan incorporates feedback from local stakeholders and proposes actionable strategies to increase broadband adoption and technology access that are tailored specifically for Benning Ridge and Marshall Heights. Connect.D.C. and its local partners will use the plan as a roadmap for implementing programs and improving service delivery in target communities. Community stakeholders will be able to use the plan to learn more about the technology needs in their community, support efforts to create a culture of technology use, and hold government and community institutions accountable.

4 Findings and Analysis

The Connected Communities team used existing broadband data, survey responses, notes and transcripts from the community conversations to paint a clearer picture of how technology is being used by residents in Benning Ridge and Marshall Heights and to understand why some people are still without access.

Who's Online

The neighborhoods in the Ward 7 digital footprint have a home wireline broadband adoption rate of 59.5%. Of the 53 residents in the Ward 7 digital footprint that participated in CCI's resident engagement survey, 28 (53%) said they had Internet access at home. Residents were more likely to access the Internet through smartphones (43%) than laptops (40%) or personal computers (32%).[10]

Internet users in the Ward 7 digital footprint utilize the Internet primarily for employment opportunities (77%). Ward 7 community conversation participants also reported using the Internet for educational purposes (62%), health and wellness (34%), housing (34%), and government services (21%). Participants in the community conversations also cited social media, banking, and shopping as regular online activities.

Who's Offline and Why

Approximately 2,400 households (40.5%) in Benning Ridge and Marshall Heights do not have home broadband access. Given that both neighborhoods have median household incomes of approximately $37,000, this finding is consistent with national research on the correlation between income and the digital divide. One study by the Pew Research Internet Project found that only 54% of families with a household income of less than $30,000 have a home broadband connection, compared to 88% of individuals with incomes greater than $75,000.[11] Families living in poverty are faced with tough choices. Although broadband is an increasingly vital resource in the technology age, paying for an Internet connection is often a lower priority when compared to more basic and immediate needs, such as food, housing, and transportation.

While it is impossible to pinpoint the specific barrier to broadband adoption for each household, the feedback we received from residents and community leaders provided valuable insight into the reasons they and others are still not online.

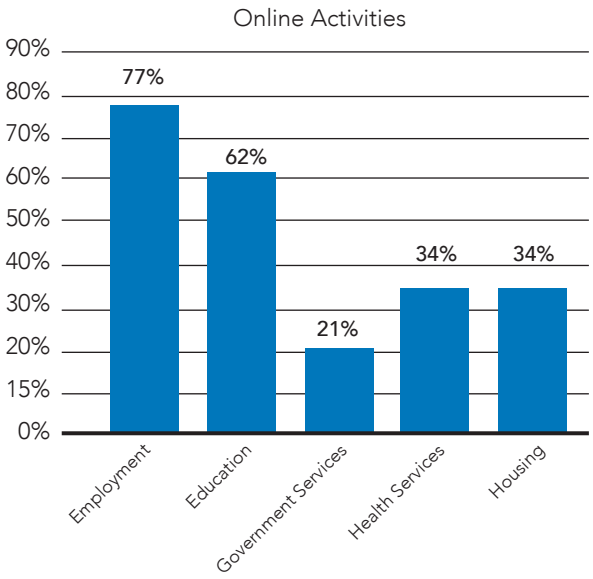
Digital Literacy

A number of residents, particularly seniors, who participated in the focus groups expressed reservations about going online and using computers because they did not have computer skills and felt intimidated by what they did not understand. Community leaders from local nonprofits also believed that their clients would benefit from improved digital literacy. They noted that something as simple as being able to exchange email with their clients would lead to better communication and also improve their ability to deliver services. Both residents and community leaders recommended that future programs should be affordable, accessible to people with different skill levels, and located in their neighborhoods.

For youth and adult participants under the age of 50, digital literacy programs were seen as important to secure employment or advance in their jobs. Many youth participants stated that they were comfortable using technology, but wanted more programs that taught advanced skills like website development and computer refurbishment. Like youth participants, many adults wanted more information and programming to help them and their children develop additional technology skills. Parents felt that their children needed advanced technology skills to compete for future jobs in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields.

Internet Security and Privacy

Many residents noted their reluctance to use technology and the Internet because of privacy and security concerns. Although the levels of apprehension varied demographically, seniors seemed most hesitant to get online for those reasons. Some young adults stated they chose not to use social media because many apps utilize location-based software. Participants from each community conversation stated the importance of becoming more digitally literate to avoid scams and security and privacy breaches.



A home broadband connection was universally acknowledged as the most useful option for consistent technology access but participants expressed concern that their subscription services are frequently unreliable, with slow and intermittent signals.

Cost and Reliability

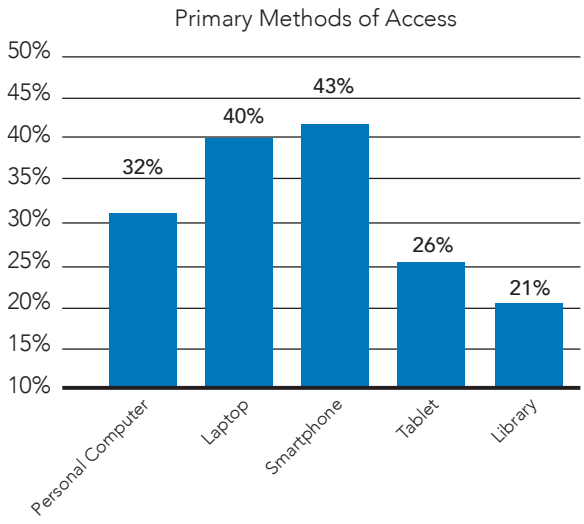
Both the residents and community leaders who participated in the community conversations cited the lack of affordable, reliable Internet service in their community as a major barrier to technology adoption. A home broadband connection was universally acknowledged as the most useful option for consistent technology access but participants expressed concern that their subscription services are frequently unreliable, with slow and intermittent signals.

The cost of technology was another major concern for community members and stakeholders in Ward 7. Even the most basic plans from major providers can cost upwards of $30 per month and bundled packages that include cable and home phone service can easily cost more than $100 per month.

Residents who said they cannot afford access in their homes often use their smartphones to access the Internet or go to local libraries to use publicly available Wi-Fi and computers. Participants noted, however, that access at libraries and other public locations presents a different set of challenges. They cited limited capacity, time limits, and a lack of privacy as major concerns. They also noted that users accessing the computers for entertainment often lock out adults who require access for jobs and educational purposes. Residents also said that the small number of libraries and the hours of operation provide obstacles for those who do not have home access and who work non-traditional hours.

Outreach and Awareness

Residents cited ineffectual marketing and outreach concerning existing programs as one of the most significant barriers to home broadband access in the Ward 7 digital footprint. Some residents said they are aware of the need for more technology resources and understand the importance of technology, but are unaware of the available services. These residents stated that increased and improved messaging is needed to reach them. Participants shared effective ways to reach residents, and recommended communicating through established, trusted networks, specifically: faith-based institutions, schools, community leaders and advisers, community anchor institutions, and senior centers.



Strategies

This plan proposes five strategies to increase broadband adoption and use within the Ward 7 digital footprint. The strategies are based on our analysis of existing broadband data as well as feedback shared by residents and community stakeholders through surveys and community conversations. We will work with CCI partners and community stakeholders to develop programs and projects based on each of the five strategies that build a culture of digital use for the neighborhoods in the digital footprint.

Strategy 1

Improve Public Education and Awareness Efforts

Continuing the grassroots efforts used to directly engage residents, community leaders and organizations, we will work with community stakeholders and partners to target specific populations that remain unconnected. A set of clear and simple messages will be developed to inform community members about the importance of Internet access as well as the resources and services available to residents.

1.1 Direct Community Outreach

The feedback and input gathered during previous community conversations and surveys have shown that a more direct approach is needed to reach households that are still unconnected. Using door-to-door outreach, street canvassing, and participation in community events, we intend to:

- Survey residents and community leaders about uses and needs as well as continuing barriers;
- Educate people about the technology resources and programs available;
- Provide accurate information to community stakeholders that address privacy and security issues;
- Inform the community of current and upcoming technology investments in this digital footprint; and
- Change attitudes and perceptions of technology.

We will also provide information that is targeted to neighborhoods in the digital footprint, including a digital citizenship guide and rack cards with information about low-cost Internet offers, public technology access sites, and Internet safety tips. This information will also be made available through a toolkit on Connect.D.C.'s website. Residents and community leaders can use the resources in the toolkit to help community members talk about technology, educate themselves about digital inclusion, and empower their communities to take full advantage of technology.

1.2 Digital Ambassadors

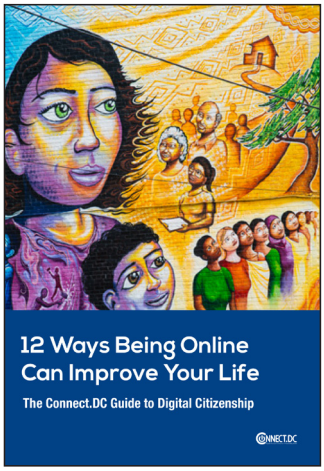
We cannot rely solely on our outreach efforts. We will enlist trusted members of the community in our CCI engagement strategies. These community members will serve as digital ambassadors to help educate and inform residents about the technology resources available to them. The ambassadors will range in age and technology exposure, serve as tech advocates in their communities, and become the "go-to" people in their community on technology topics. Ambassadors will train and share their skills with other members of the community, and show residents how to use digital tools that can make their lives easier.

1.3 Media Campaign

In December 2013, we launched our Get Connected media campaign with ads in local newspapers and Metrorail cars and stations, on public transit buses, and through direct mail. We used community and nonprofit leaders to inform people about our program, express the importance of being connected, and to market affordable Internet and computer offers available through our key partner, EveryoneOn. We will build on the success of that campaign by expanding to more media outlets (e.g., radio) and narrowing our focus on communities in this footprint. The new media campaign targeting Ward 7 residents will feature everyday people communicating the importance of Internet access and how they've used technology to improve their lives.

1.4 Community Conversations and Working Groups

We will continue to hold community conversations with local stakeholders to reach more residents in the footprint, discuss current technology usage by residents in the footprint, and identify remaining barriers to technology adoption. We will also establish working groups comprised of residents and community leaders to help us implement these strategies, discuss the issues and challenges brought up in future community conversations, and recommend next steps to address those challenges.



Strategy 2

Expand Digital Literacy and Advanced Training Programs

We will work with our community partners to educate residents about existing digital literacy programs and expand access to these programs by bringing technology and programming directly to residents in their neighborhoods. While residents and community leaders acknowledged the importance of basic digital literacy training, they also recognized that more advanced training opportunities are needed to offer clear pathways to careers for communities that are underrepresented in the technology field.

2.1 Basic Computer Training

Residents and local stakeholders who participated in the community conversations recommended that future computer training programs should be affordable and accessible to people with different skill levels. As a result, we will partner with community organizations to offer basic and intermediate technology courses as well as advanced technical certifications. These courses will build basic computer skills and provide essential job training services to residents in the footprint. Classes will be held in accessible neighborhood locations, including libraries and community-based organizations.

2.2 Advanced Training Programs

Participants of the community conversations stated a need for more advanced programming that specifically increase employment opportunities. We will develop programs with partners that educate youth and adult residents by funding training that meets the needs of job seekers and employers. We will partner with nonprofit organizations that have existing curricula and proven track records of success.

Youth Tech Programs – We will identify potential partners that provide intensive training aimed at skill development, retention, and employment for youth and young adults in fields ranging from network support and hardware repair to customer service and help desk.

Coding for Change – Advanced training is an important part of cultivating a tech-savvy community that not only consumes technology, but also produces and designs technology. To continue the development of the pipeline, we will partner with Code for Progress, a nonprofit that trains adults from underrepresented groups (e.g., minorities, women, LGBTQ) to code and develop web applications. We will partner with Code for Progress to promote their 12-month fellowship and sponsor three fellows from underserved communities in the District, particularly in Wards 7 and 8. Residents who successfully complete the fellowship will have the opportunity to be involved in the development of applications that meet the needs of their communities.

2.3 Mobile Tech Lab Programs

We will use our Mobile Tech Lab (MTL)—a 48-foot converted bookmobile equipped with computers and wireless Internet—to increase access to digital technology in the neighborhoods within this digital footprint. We will partner with District government agencies and nonprofit organizations to create content for at least four of the "verticals" (e.g., jobs, education, civic engagement) referenced in *12 Ways Being Online Can Improve Your Life*, Connect.D.C.'s digital citizenship guide. These programs will take place onboard the MTL with scheduled stops in each of the neighborhoods in the digital footprint. We will also collaborate with community-based organizations and District government agencies to bring their existing programs to the lab.

Strategy 3

Create Relevant Content

Participants in our community conversations stated that some residents do not use technology because they either could not see its importance to their everyday lives or did not have access to relevant online content. We will partner with community-based partners to generate content that specifically addresses some of the everyday issues faced by non-adopters.

3.1 Digital Demonstration Projects

Our two digital demonstration projects successfully engaged residents, community-based organizations, and District government agencies, demonstrating the many ways that technology can be used and applied to their daily lives. We plan to host additional digital demonstration projects, either issue-specific or targeting specific population segments (e.g., seniors, youth, returning citizens, job-seekers), to help residents connect the importance of technology use and adoption to the issues impacting their lives and communities.

3.2 Mobile Application Development

Exploring and developing engaging and dynamic content is the next step in creating a connection for low-tech and non-adopters. Focusing on the interactive aspect of demonstration projects, we plan to co-sponsor a series of tech workshops that pair application developers with residents and community leaders. Developers will help residents build applications or "apps" to address issues (e.g., housing, employment, safety) impacting them and their communities.

The workshops will provide an opportunity for residents to be at the helm of creating relevant content for themselves. The workshops will also equip them with skills to become "citizen developers"—individuals who may not possess advanced technical skills but who can contribute to the development of tech solutions to the social and economic challenges faced by non-adopters.

3.3 Internet Security and Privacy Guide

Digital literacy programs are effective tools in diminishing barriers to technology adoption; however, programs must be coupled with educating residents about Internet security and privacy. Participants in the community conversations noted Internet security and privacy as concerns and obstacles that hindered Internet use and adoption. To address this barrier, we will create a guide about Internet security and privacy that offers user-friendly tips and best practices to help residents avoid falling victim to scams and fraudulent online activity.

Strategy 4

Increase Public Technology Resources for Residents and Community Organizations

The ability to access computers and Internet service in libraries, community centers, and other local institutions that are open and accessible to the public is critically important to the residents who do not have broadband service at home. In our tech survey, 21% of respondents reported that they use the library to connect to the Internet. Public access is important to residents in this digital footprint who utilize these locations to check email, access essential services, and apply for jobs. Based on feedback and concerns from community conversation participants, we will work to improve and expand public technology access in the digital footprint.

4.1 Assess Current Wi-Fi Coverage and Identify New Public Tech Access Locations

Libraries remain an important source for public computer access and training in low-income neighborhoods where public and in-home access is limited. We will work with DC-Net, the OCTO program that provides wired and wireless broadband to District government buildings and some community-based organizations, to conduct a speed and coverage assessment in existing Wi-Fi service areas. We will also work with DC-Net to identify locations, such as public housing facilities and local nonprofits, for potential new wireless hotspots and improved public broadband infrastructure.

4.2 MTL 2.0

Our MTL provides free computer and Internet access to the general public, with particular focus in areas with low home broadband adoption rates. The vehicle has been deployed more than 90 times to community events throughout the city, but additional capacity is needed to meet the needs of local stakeholders. To address the growing demand, we will complete major renovations on the vehicle in early 2015. Upgrades will include a new external design, wheelchair access, and twice the number of computer workstations. We will bring the renovated "MTL 2.0" to locations throughout the digital footprint for free digital literacy training sessions.

4.3 Low-Cost Hardware and Software for Local Nonprofits

We will help local nonprofits aquire computer hardware to increase public technology resources in community-based organizations. Internet access, computers, and other technology devices will be open to residents who seek services at these organizations. Locations with appropriate capacity may also serve as sites for computer training classes. New public access locations will be added to our existing Tech Locator tool.

Strategy 5

Expand Access to Affordable Home Internet and Computer Hardware

While public technology access provides a valuable service to residents who need it, home broadband service is universally accepted as the most effective way to ensure residents can take full advantage of everything the Internet has to offer. Unfortunately, about 2,400 households in the digital footprint do not have broadband service, due in part to the cost of Internet access and computer hardware.

In 2013, we established a partnership with EveryoneOn to make discounted Internet service and computer offers available to low-income District residents. We will continue to increase the number of offers available, reduce the cost of service for low-income residents, and address barriers to home broadband service and availability.

5.1 Increase the Number of Affordable Internet and Hardware Providers

The high cost of broadband service is a barrier to universal home usage. We will continue to work with EveryoneOn to identify new potential service providers that offer low-cost Internet service and computer hardware to District residents. New offers will be required to be comparable in price to existing services ($10 per month).

Through its website, EveryoneOn provides additional affordable products for low-income families, including refurbished laptops and tablets. We will also work to identify additional local computer refurbishers who can provide affordable offers for Ward 7 residents.

5.2 Subsidize Internet Service for D.C. Residents

We will pilot a program to subsidize the cost of Internet service for eligible digital footprint residents. The initiative will create an incentive program that provides refurbished hardware and 6-12 months of free service for individuals who complete computer-training programs with digital literacy partners. We will continue to conduct extensive surveys within the digital footprints in order to follow the progress of participants and students over time. Their feedback will provide important insights to help the initiative better meet the needs of local stakeholders.

5.3 Prepaid Internet Cards

Building on a model used by Comcast Internet Essentials, we plan to work with EveryoneOn and existing Internet service providers (ISPs) to explore the creation of prepaid Internet cards that will be loaded with funds and applied to customer Internet service accounts. These cards would be available for purchase in multiple increments and would allow nonprofit organizations and other community institutions to subsidize the monthly service cost of low-income families in need.

Previous attempts at bulk adoption have been cumbersome and have placed a high administrative burden on sponsoring organizations. The prepaid cards service would create an efficient process for institutions seeking to sponsor residents while also allowing individuals to maintain control of their own accounts. The cards will only be applied to valid accounts with participating ISPs, and will have no monetary value.

5.4 Work with ISPs to Assess Coverage Needs

One of the issues consistently raised during community conversations was the poor quality of Internet service in the Ward 7 digital footprint. Multiple home Internet subscribers described unreliable signals while accessing the Internet in their homes. We will work with existing Internet service providers as well as DC-Net to identify and address specific barriers to the quality of service in the digital footprints.

6 Next Steps

The work is just beginning for the neighborhoods in the Ward 7 digital footprint. Achieving the goal of full broadband adoption will require commitment and action from all stakeholders. We will continue working with local nonprofits and community leaders to launch the projects outlined in this plan. While federal funding from NTIA was an important catalyst for launching this work, additional funding, resources, and support are needed for this plan to be successful. These strategies will serve as a guide for the Connected Communities Initiative to create a culture of digital excellence in the neighborhoods of Marshall Heights and Benning Ridge.

This community technology plan will be reviewed for progress and effectiveness on a yearly basis. During the two-year implementation phase, we will track and update the plan's progress to ensure that:

- CCI remains focused on key stakeholders – the residents of the District;
- The initiative gains the confidence and trust of our community stakeholders; and
- There is accountability to the residents and community partners.

We believe this initiative is a long-term investment in the future of the people who reside in the Ward 7 digital footprint. Partnerships with local agencies and community organizations will be key to our ability to implement the strategies in this plan.

We also plan to work in other neighborhoods in the District where the Connected Communities Initiative can serve as an effective model for increasing technology use. In 2015, we will begin the planning process for a new digital footprint using the same selection criteria we used in Ward 7. The new footprint must have low home broadband adoption rates and community assets that can be leveraged to implement strategies for technology adoption and use. The lessons learned during our work in the Ward 7 digital footprint will be extremely valuable as we begin planning in the new digital footprint.

This community technology plan was not created to be a universal solution to the digital disparities that exist throughout the entire city. It is meantx to serve as a guide for increasing broadband adoption and technology use in this digital footprint. The plan is intended to explain the perceived barriers to technology adoption from the community's perspective, and to help us adopt and implement viable strategies to remove those barriers. The strategies are a roadmap for creating programs and partnerships that will inform, educate, and bring together the members of the Ward 7 digital footprint into full digital citizenship.

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About Connect.D.C.
Connect.D.C. was formed in 2010 by the Office of the Chief Technology Officer with two grants from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to remove barriers to Internet access and increase technology use in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods in the District of Columbia.